DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 974 IR 015 937

AUTHOR McGreal, Rory; And Others
TITLE Recommendations on Distance Education to the Northern Education Project of the Ministry of Education of the Government of Ontario. Submitted by the Distance Education Secondary School Committee of Northern Ontario.
PUB DATE 16 Nov 92
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; Computer Assisted Instruction; *Computer Networks; Curriculum Enrichment; *Distance Education; *Educational Cooperation; Foreign Countries; Geographic Location; Inservice Teacher Education; Nontraditional Education; Regional Cooperation; Rural Schools; Secondary Education; *Shared Resources and Services; *Telecommunications
IDENTIFIERS *Ontario

ABSTRACT

This report of the Distance Education Secondary School Committee of Northern Ontario, which is composed of representatives of the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Independent Learning Centre, Native and French language components of the MOE, and Contact North, discusses the role that the Contact North distance education network can play in the achievement of the goals of the Ontario government. Government priorities are listed, and contributions of Contact North in providing residents of isolated communities increased access to formal and informal educational opportunities are summarized. Contact North services to delivering institutions are listed, and curriculum support potential is identified. Benefits for students, teachers, and school board personnel are considered, including increased curriculum options, course enhancement, cultural enrichment, guidance and career planning, educational upgrading, inservice training, and development of local programs. Background on Contact North participants, funding considerations, course delivery, and the advantages of centralization is provided. The benefits of collaboration are discussed, including cost-efficiency, a universal timetable, participation by provincially-funded schools, large school participation, stability, and minimized local differences; and recommendations are offered for release time for teachers to deliver courses on the Contact North system and funding for smaller school boards to provide inservice training, curriculum development, and supervisory services through distance education. (ALF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED353974

RECOMMENDATIONS ON DISTANCE EDUCATION TO THE NORTHERN EDUCATION PROJECT OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO

Principal Authors:
Rory McGreal, Lois Tobin,
Bernie Simand, Gerard Violette

1992-11-16

SUBMITTED BY

THE DISTANCE EDUCATION SECONDARY SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF NORTHERN ONTARIO

Members

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION/MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION

Marcel Barriault Norm McKinnon
Independent Learning Centre/Centre d'études indépendantes

Keith Lickers
Native Education Policy Unit

Lise Fanjoy
Direction de l'éducation en langue française

Ray Shulman Denis Yapps
Northeastern Ontario Region/Nord-est de l'Ontario

Roland Blake Aubrey Smith
Midnorthern Ontario Region/Centre-nord de l'Ontario

Al Campbell Henri Rocque
Northwestern Ontario Region/Nord-ouest de l'Ontario

CONTACT NORTH/CONTACT NORD:

Gérard Lafrenière *Director/Directeur*

Evonne Sabourin *Native Liaison Officer/ Agente de la liaison aux autochtones*

Rory McGreal *Secondary School Liaison Supervisor/ Superviseur de la liaison aux écoles secondaires*

Lois Tobin *Secondary School Liaison Officer/ Agente de la liaison aux écoles secondaires*

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Rory McGreal

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

IR015937

INTRODUCTION

The present government of Ontario has identified the following priorities:

- opening the corridors of power to those who have not had an effective voice; listening to people and responding to their needs;
- aiding rural dwellers to access and share in the benefits of Ontario society;
- increasing the potential for sustainable and environmentally responsible growth and diversification of the economies of Ontario communities;
- reducing growing inequities, breaking down the barriers to equal participation in and contribution to Ontario society, making people less vulnerable, allowing them to meet their full potential, and responding to their willingness to learn new skills;
- promoting greater cultural, racial and linguistic understanding in order to protect rights, increase access and equity, meet social and economic goals, and enrich appreciation of our multicultural society.

The Distance Education Secondary School Committee of Northern Ontario (DESSC) which is composed of representatives of the three northern offices of the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) Native and French language components of the MOE, and Contact North, feels that the Contact North distance education network can play a key role in the achievement of these goals in Northern Ontario. As the North's distance education network, Contact North has as its mandate the objective of providing residents of isolated

communities increased access to both formal and informal educational opportunities. Distance education when used effectively, can be a key means of overcoming the inequality in opportunities that presently exists in remote Northern Ontario communities. In recognition of the particular problems of francophones and natives, Contact North also has a special mandate to improve opportunities for these target groups.

By providing remote communities with greater choice in educational possibilities, increased opportunities for cultural activities and easier access to information, the Contact North distance education network helps remote communities to overcome some of the inequalities present because of their geographic and cultural isolation. The network can also be used by remote communities as a means of accessing more benefits, and reaching the centres of admininstration. The network provides Northern Ontario with an effective and economical means of empowerment.

At the secondary education level, the Contact North distance education network can be used by students, teachers and board personnel in remote communities as an effective tool for overcoming at least some of the problems caused by their isolation. Through the audiographic tele-conferencing network now in place in northern schools, students can have access to a wider range of course options. Teachers can consult with more experienced teachers in other communities, or take educational upgrading courses. Board supervisors and consultants can use the network for in-service teacher training or for meetings.

The future success of secondary education in Northern Ontario can best be achieved through **collaboration** among the school boards, the Ministry of Education, the Independent Learning Centre and Contact North. The existing distance education network with sites in over 130 Northern locations can be productively used by the boards for the **cost-effective sharing of resources.** The ability of every school using our network to not only receive, but also to deliver courses also promotes **local ownership.**

More specifically, the Contact North network can serve as a major medium for introducing **computers across the curriculum** according to the new guidelines proposed in the Ministry of Education draft policy document introduced in June, 1991. Contact North provides users with equal access to computers and modern telecommunications media which permit students and teachers to collaborate with other schools and learning institutions in every curricular area. In addition, the Contact North network can facilitate life-long learning in remote communities through technology, providing local school boards with wider opportunities for curriculum and professional development, community interaction and special education.

CONTACT NORTH SERVICES

Contact North is an electronic communications network that can be used by any provincially-funded educational institution. The network provides the following services to delivering institutions:

- Access to over 100 sites in Northern Ontario. (Over 80 sites in secondary schools;)
- Use of the audiographic teleconferencing and computer conferencing network, fax machines, and an IBM compatible computer and printer;
- Training of deliverers in using the available technological media effectively;
- General and specific information to users on the extent of the Contact North network and on its effective use;
- Technical support locally with a network of community site coordinators;
- Promotion of the delivering institution's services in the local communities;
- Instructional design assistance to help instructors adapt their materials for distance delivery;
- Administrative support including scheduling of teleconferences and site coordination;
- Support in liaising and coordinating activities among secondary schools and school boards.

The Contact North distance education network has been used by secondary schools and boards of education for many educational activities. These are some of the ways that Contact North can be used to promote secondary education in Northern Ontario:

CURRICULUM SUPPORT

Contact North possesses the technical and human resources to enable it to provide curriculum enhancement assistance for distance education to teachers across Northern Ontario. The audiographic teleconferencing network enables teachers and students from different parts of the North to exchange ideas and experiences. The personnel of Contact North include qualified teachers and other personnel with a reservoir of experience in distance education, computers, educational technology,

instructional design, teacher training and community liaison. The state of the art technology provided by Contact North has proven to be educationally effective and reliable.

FOR STUDENTS

The Contact North network allows students the possibility of access to a **wider choice of curriculum options**. Many small schools (and some larger ones) cannot offer a full range of credit courses, particularly at the senior and OAC levels. Through distance education, it is now possible for students to take courses offered by other schools.

Course enhancement activities can also be delivered effectively on the network. The "Writers in Electronic Residence" programme that links secondary students with professional writers across the country through computer conferencing is one application that has been used successfully by students in Northern Ontario. The Royal Ontario Museum is now preparing modules for delivery via Contact North of specific course programmes

Innovative **cultural enrichment** activities are made possible via Contact North. Electronic "site tours" like the recent tours of the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Canadian Mint are examples of these types of enrichment activities. Students now have a window on other Northern Ontario communities and even to foreign countries. Students have already participated in electronic "field trips" to Costa Rica and Australia. These are attractive to students, especially those living in isolated communities or in young offender facilities.

Students can also use the electronic network for specific help in **guidance and career planning**. Contact North presently runs a yearly workshop in collaboration with Cambrian College on how to fill out the Ontario Student Assistant Plan forms. Students can also access, at Contact North sites, the *Electronic Horizons* program to help them in their career decisions. Health information (eg., AIDS and drug abuse prevention programmes) can also be disseminated to students and the wider public.

FOR TEACHERS and SCHOOL BOARD PERSONNEL

Teachers can use the Contact North network for increased access to **educational upgrading** and **in-service training**. The **development of local programmes** in accordance with the Ministry of Education guidelines can also be facilitated on the network. Supervisory officers also can access the network for meetings and other activities. Contact North is mandated to support the delivery of courses, therefore credit courses will have priority on the network. The other informal educational

activities are strongly encouraged, but they are not subsidised by Contact North. They are supported subject to the availability of the sites and space on the bridge. The sponsors of non-credit educational activities must pay for the use of the bridge and for the telephone line charges.

BACKGROUND

The Contact North secondary school initiative is just beginning. Over 100 new secondary school and other sites have been recently added to the network. To date, every secondary school in Northern Ontario outside of the main centres of Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie and North Bay is equipped as a Contact North site.

Over 45 different autonomous school boards are presently involved in delivering secondary credits. These boards are all equal in regards to their autonomy, but not equal when it comes to financial resources. Distance education can be used to bring equality of services to them all. Unfortunately, without funding from outside the board, it is very difficult for small boards to participate, paying fees to the delivering board.

In addition, the participation of a number of schools in a course often creates problems of ownership over the courses. It is often difficult to determine which party is responsible for supervision, invigilation, crediting the course and so on.

Post-secondary institutions do not suffer from such divisions. They have signed collaborative agreements, and can deliver their courses, under their own control, anywhere on the network, even into each others' catchment area. An example will demonstrate the problem of the secondary sector:

> *An adult student who worked during the week in the territory of Board A, but who resided in the territory of Board B tried to enrol in an OAC English distance education course which was offered by K Secondary School. The K Board of Education explained to her that they could not legally enrol her without permission from Board B. Board B felt that she should take the course in their Alternative programme and so, refused her. She then applied to Board A which covers the town where she worked. She is not a resident of Board A territory, so they would not give her permission either. Finally, the student found herself unable to access the course.*

Other problems further hinder secondary course delivery and reception. Last minute cancellations and changes by delivering schools continue to cause great inconvenience to receiving schools. Last year, three schools cancelled their courses at the last minute. One school changed the course offered on the first day of class. This September one school cancelled and at least three other change their delivery times.

Small schools usually will not offer the same course two years running. There is a large turnover of teachers in the remote schools. Students from different grade levels must be bunched in order to get sufficient numbers to warrant a teacher. In addition, small schools just do not have the resources.

Financial payments for courses are a major deterrent to small schools. At least four schools dropped out of course reception this year because they would not pay the $300 or more fee. Small schools find it extremely difficult to pay for these courses. The flip side is that the school boards that are in the best position to deliver courses, due to their relative wealth, have little incentive to do so.

Exchanging course delivery instead of paying is more difficult to effect than it seems. First, schools must agree on courses that they both want. This is reasonable with two schools, but getting three schools to agree on a packet of three courses is nearly impossible. Add problems of timetabling, finding qualified teachers, arranging agreements among the boards and coordinating school calendars and this amounts to giant headaches for small school principals who are already overloaded with other problems. Remember that the problems grow exponentially for each additional participating school.

Perhaps the problems involved in the coordination of timetables form the greatest obstacle to distance education course delivery. Three French language credit courses were offered during the lunch hour this semester. This prevented students in any participating school from taking more than one distance education course. In addition, due to busing problems, courses cannot normally be scheduled before or after school. Presently each participating school has to renegotiate the timetable every semester for each distance education course.

Many of the more serious impediments to secondary school distance education are a direct result of the division of Northern Ontario into different educational jurisdictions. Collaboration among them is essential for the success of the network. According to opinions voiced at three distance education workshops held by Contact North in February, 1991 for Northwest and Northeast anglophones and for Francophones, the principals support the centralization of the organization of course delivery.

The success of distance education at the post-secondary level as well as the initial success of the secondary pilot project sponsored by the MOE this year illustrate the benefits of centralizing the organization of the course delivery. The success of distance education programmes in Louisiana and Newfoundland is mainly due to their centralization. On the other hand, the relatively low participation of schools in distance education programmes in New York and Pennsylvania are primarily due to the lack of centralization.

Centralization of the organization, does NOT mean that the secondary network must be controlled by one central school board or organization, NOR does it mean that teachers must deliver from one central location. The centre can be governed through a collaborative agreement among the boards themselves, the ILC, the Ministry of Education, and Contact North. Teachers can deliver courses from any one of the participating schools. All Contact North sites can be used to deliver courses. In this way, small schools can participate, offering courses as well as receiving them. The paradox is that the centralization will allow small schools to be more autonomous and independent, allowing their students a wider choice of credit courses.

THE BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

The most significant benefit of centralization would be in **cost-efficiency**. Because most of the small remote schools that use the network for course delivery and reception are very heavily funded by the Ministry of Education (up to 98% in some cases), the costs to the Ministry exist whether or not the course is delivered centrally or through an exchange among school boards. In either case, the Ministry is paying for the cost of the teacher. A centralized organization would make courses accessible to more schools and therefore more cost-efficient on a student per course basis. This year in a pilot project , the Regional offices are paying the salary and benefits costs of teachers in 7 different school boards (5 courses in English and 5 in French) to deliver courses via Contact North. Last year, with a decentralised system courses were being delivered to an average of 4 to 5 students. The cost of enroling students in a centralized network will be relatively low per student, due to broad participation.

Another important and immediate benefit of centralization would be the ability to put out a **universal timetable** as early as December or January. This would allow principals to choose courses for students and teachers within the school while integrating the distance education course offerings into their local timetable. This is considered essential for the success of a distance education course programme.

Centralization would **allow all provincially-funded schools to participate**. Students anywhere in the North would be able to access the courses being delivered without having to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles caused by jurisdictional differences among the different school boards.

At present there is little incentive for **large school participation**. The big schools in the larger centres can provide nearly all their course needs internally and have no reason to become involved in course delivery to smaller schools. This is unfortunate, because they can draw on a more diverse bank of resources both in personnel and in course materials than the smaller schools. A centralized system could provide incentives to encourage the larger schools to become involved in delivering courses to the remote communities. A number of large schools have expressed an interest in becoming involved in course delivery, but they are responsible to local tax payers and so could not justify the use of resources to teach students in other educational jurisdictions.

Collaboration by the boards for centralization of the organization of distance education course delivery would bring some much needed **stability** into the course delivery structure, and hopefully put an end to a situation where teachers are chosen every year, usually at the last minute. A cadre of experienced distance education teachers would develop, who could then share their expertise in an expanding network.

Local differences in the level of expertise and ability to deliver courses would be **kept to a minimum**. The distance education centre would provide an overlap of educational philosophies between the different boards and create a forum for the exchange of curriculum information among the isolated schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

Because of the success of the initial ILC and the present Regional Office of the MOE pilot projects teaching via Contact North, funding should be allocated through the ILC, the Regional Offices or through a Northern school board for the release of teachers each year to deliver courses on the Contact North system. This would allow small and large schools to receive compensation for permitting the involvement of their teachers in delivering distance education courses. The courses given by these teachers will be offered free of charge to participating schools.

Recommendation 2

Funding should be allocated to help small school boards to cooperate in teacher in-service training, curriculum development, supervisory services and other school board services via distance education. The distance education funding should be provided only to boards willing to take advantage of the Contact North network for the provision of services and training through collaboration. Line and bridge charges for credit courses are absorbed by Contact North, the charges for other activities must be absorbed by the participants.

CONCLUSION

Cooperation for distance education , effectively promoted by the Ministry of Education, will not only establish a framework for the **cost-effective sharing of resources**, but also promote more **local ownership**. The use of the Contact North distance education network by small schools and school boards is the least expensive means of delivering credit courses to Northern residents. In addition, other activities such as information sharing, consultation and professional development become more accessible despite the isolation caused by geographical barriers.

Moreover, using the network develops an appreciation among the users of the advantages, limitations and possibilities of the new technology across the curriculum. The network introduces teachers and students to the information age. Most importantly, the new distance education technology strongly encourages **collaboration** and provides quality educational opportunities to the residents of Northern Ontario.